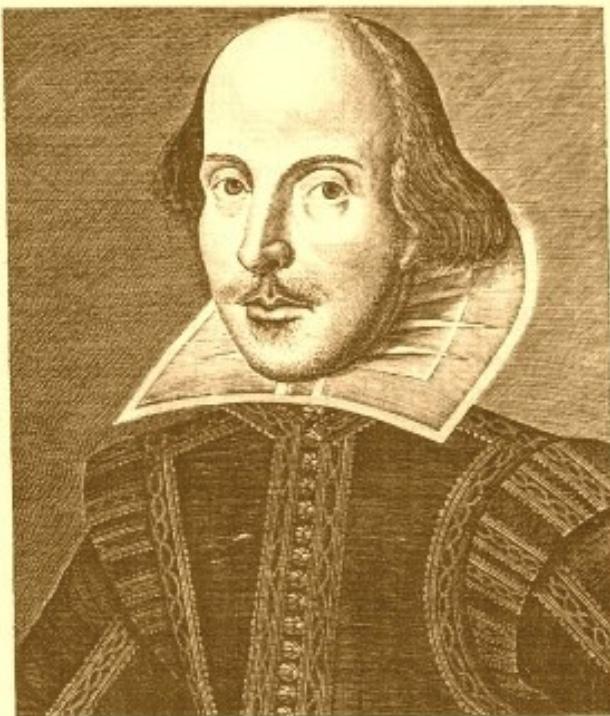


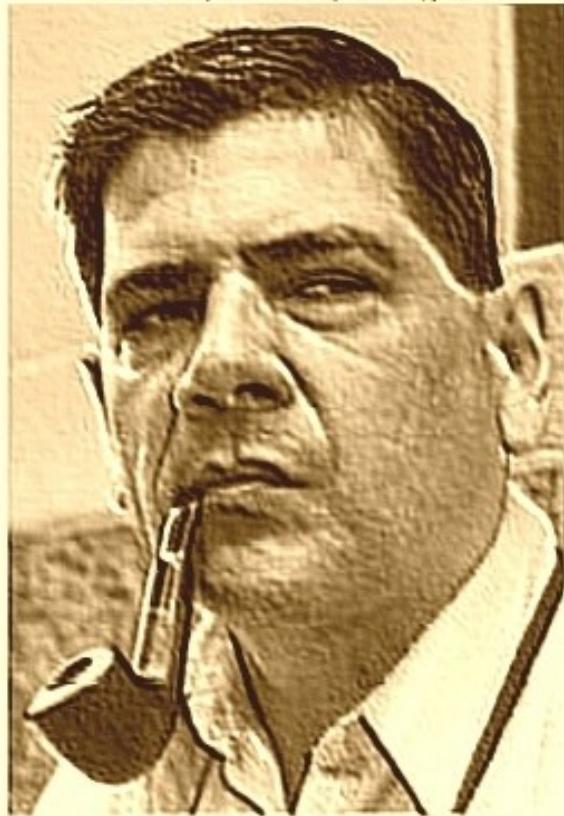
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to Modern English - for contemporary
readers and performers
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Shakespeare For White Trash: Coriolanus

Classic literature translated into Modern English by Crad Kilodney

October 7, 2010 – Author’s Note:

“Shakespeare For White Trash” is a series of condensed rewrites designed to make Shakespeare understandable and enjoyable to those who have little or no knowledge of him. The plots and characters are unchanged, but everything else has been radically restyled. Read my versions and you’ll be a Shakespeare fan forever!

These plays are intended to be performed, as well as read.

Main Characters

Coriolanus (a.k.a. Caius Martius) — Roman general

Menenius — old noble and closest friend of Coriolanus

Cominius — Roman Consul and commander-in-chief

Titus Lartius — Roman general

Sicinius and Brutus — tribunes

Volumnia — Coriolanus’ mother

Virgilia — Coriolanus’ wife

Valeria — noble lady

Young Martius — Coriolanus’ son

Lieutenant of Titus Lartius

Aufidius — leader of the Volscians

Nicanor — Roman traitor

Adrian — Volscian spy

Lieutenant of Aufidius

Three Conspirators — henchmen of Aufidius

Three Servants of Aufidius

Two Watchmen

Two Officers (Referred to as Aediles in the original. These are low-ranking officers assigned to assist tribunes.)

Roman Senators and Nobles

Citizens (Plebeians) of Rome

Herald

Volscian Senators

Gist of the story: This play takes place in the early years of the Roman Republic, circa 493 B.C. Caius Martius, a Roman general, is heroic in battle against a barbarian tribe known as the Volscians. He captures their capital of Corioles, for which he is given the honorary name of Coriolanus. The Roman Senate nominates him for Consul, but he must be approved by the common people (plebeians), whom he despises. An inflexible man, he is really unsuited for political office. He forces himself to speak to the people, and at first they approve him. But two hostile tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, instigate a show of public hostility and accuse Coriolanus of treason. As punishment, he is banished from Rome. Furious at such treatment, he goes to the Volscians and offers to lead their army against Rome. The leader of the Volscians, Aufidius, accepts the offer. Coriolanus leads the Volscian army and is on the verge of capturing Rome when his mother pleads with him to make peace. He agrees and takes the army back to the Volscian town of Antium to explain what has happened. Aufidius, however, accuses Coriolanus of betrayal, and his henchmen assassinate the Roman general.

(Historically at this time the plebeians, or common people, were gaining some power, so the theme of class conflict is prominent in the first half of the play. Coriolanus is a patrician, or noble, who is against giving power to the people, so he is very much a reactionary. His inflexibility and short temper are tragic flaws in an otherwise noble, heroic character. So, like some other characters in Shakespeare, he fits the formula for a protagonist in a Greek tragedy. And like the protagonists of Greek tragedies, we can appreciate him without having to like him. This is the way he comes across in Shakespeare's original. However, in this restyling I think our white trash audience will like him, despite his class consciousness.)

Act 1, Scene. *A street in Rome. A crowd of angry Citizens comes in shouting “Mutiny!” They are armed with sticks and clubs. Only the “2nd Citizen” is unarmed and self-restrained.*

1st Citizen: We'll fight the bastards before they starve us to death! Are you with me?

Citizens: Yes!—We'll get them!—The rich bastards!

1st Citizen: And who's our biggest enemy?

Citizens: Caius Martius!

1st Citizen: We'll kill him, and then we'll have all the corn we want!

Citizens: Yes!—Kill him!—No more starving!

2nd Citizen: Wait! Wait!—Please, good citizens—

1st Citizen: Good citizens? If we were good citizens, the nobles wouldn't let us starve. They treat their dogs better than they treat us. We could get fat eating the scraps from their tables. They want us to stay poor so they can feel more superior.

2nd Citizen: But what do you have against Caius Martius?

Citizens: He hates us!—He's a patrician snob!

2nd Citizen: But think of what he's done for Rome—all the battles he's won as a general.

1st Citizen: Whatever he did, he wasn't thinking of Rome. He did it for his own inflated ego—and to please his mother.

(Distant shouts are heard — a similar mob scene.)

1st Citizen: You hear that? They're rioting on the other side of the city, too!

(Menenius, an old noble, comes in.)

2nd Citizen: It's Menenius. He's a good guy.

1st Citizen: That he is. I wish all the nobles were like him.

Menenius: My good neighbours, what's the problem here? Why are you so angry?

1st Citizen: The Senate knows what we're angry about. We've been complaining for weeks about the food shortage.

Menenius: But rebelling like this will only lead to your ruin.

1st Citizen: We're already ruined. We'll be dead of starvation if we don't rebel, so what do we have to lose?

Menenius: No, no, no—it isn't like that, believe me. The senators are always thinking of your well-being. Don't blame them for the shortage of food. Blame the gods. It's foolish to rebel against the state. The state is too strong. You mustn't get carried away by your emotions.

1st Citizen: The nobles have storehouses full of corn, but they let us starve. They make laws to protect themselves, not us.

Menenius: Now, now.—Let me tell you a little story. It will help you to understand.

A Citizen: Yes, tell us a good story. *(To the audience)* We love good stories, don't we?

Menenius: Fine. Here it is.—Once upon a time, all the other parts of the body rebelled against the stomach. They said, “Why do you get to do all the eating while we have to do all the hard work?” And the stomach replied, “If I didn’t eat, you couldn’t do anything. When I eat, all the nourishment is digested and goes through the blood to all of you.” That’s the way it is with the Senate of Rome. They are the stomach, and you are the other parts of the body.

Same Citizen: Ah, I get it. It’s what they call trickle-down economics.

1st Citizen: I call it a crock. We want food! And we’ll rebel if we have to!

Citizens: Yes! Yes!

Menenius: You have a big mouth. You just want to be some kind of revolutionary hero. But if you had to face real danger, you’d run like a coward. *(To the Citizens)* If you’re feeling aggressive, save it for the barbarians. You’ll be fighting them soon.

(Caius Martius comes in. The Citizens boo.)

Menenius: Hail, noble Martius!

Martius: Yeah, whatever. *(To the Citizens)* What are you riffraff doing here, looking for trouble? Go home before I kick all your butts!

1st Citizen (To the others): He loves us, doesn’t he?

Martius: The white trash of Rome! Always bitching! *(To Menenius)* What are they bitching about now?

Menenius: Food shortages. They blame the nobles.

Martius: What a bunch of bums! If the Senate agreed to look the other way for just one day, I’d slaughter all these rats!

Menenius: It’s just a little show of emotion. Don’t worry about it.—What’s going on over on the other side?

Martius: Same thing. Another bitching mob. The Senate agreed to one of their demands.

Menenius: What was it?

Martius: They get to choose five tribunes to represent them. They’ve already picked Brutus and Sicinius—and some other jerks, I forget who. Big mistake, believe me. Give in to the rabble, and it won’t stop. Now if I were in charge—*(He puts his hand on his sword to frighten the Citizens)*—Go home, you dogs!

(A Messenger rushes in.)

Messenger: Message for Caius Martius.

(He presents a clipboard and ballpoint pen to Martius, who is puzzled by the unfamiliar objects.)

Martius: What the fuck is this?

Messenger: You're supposed to sign, sir.

Martius: Sign for what?

Messenger: The message, sir.

Martius: Sign for the message?

Messenger: Oh, wait—sorry. My mistake. It's a verbal message. You don't have to sign for it.

(Martius breaks the clipboard and pen.)

Martius (Shouting): What's the fucking message?

Messenger (Cowed): Em—the Volsces, sir.

Martius: What about the Volsces?

Messenger: They're arming against us, sir.

Martius (Delighted): Oh! Right on! I get to kill fucking barbarians! *(To the Citizens)* You're all drafted—ha, ha! You can fight, too! The Volsces have plenty of corn! You'll like that, won't you?

(Cominius, Titus Lartius, and Senators come in, along with Brutus and Sicinius.)

Martius: Ah!—The cream of Rome—*(Contemptuously, at Brutus and Sicinius)* and a couple of sour curds.

1st Senator: Martius, you warned us, and you were right. The Volsces are preparing to make war against us.

Martius: And you know who their leader is—Tullus Aufidius. He's the real deal, let me tell you. If I couldn't be me, I'd be him.

Cominius: You've fought him before.

Martius: I sure have. He's never beaten me, but I've never been able to kill him. He's a lion. He's the only one who's worthy to fight me.

1st Senator: The Senate places its full trust and confidence in you, General. You will be second-in-command under Cominius.

Cominius: I'm sure you don't mind.

Martius: Mind? Hey, it's an honour.—Titus Lartius, I expect you to be there when I fight Aufidius—and kill him.

Lartius: For sure.

Martius: Or were you going to take your vacation—ha!

Lartius: No, no. No holiday for this general. I wouldn't miss this show for anything.

1st Senator: You're all primed for action, ha, ha! That's good. Let's go back to the Capitol. Our friends are waiting for us.

Lartius (To Cominius): After you, Consul. (*Cominius proceeds. To Martius*) After you, General.

(They leave, with Cominius leading, followed by Martius, followed by Lartius, followed by the Senators. The 1st Senator turns to the Citizens.)

1st Senator: Go-home!

(Martius laughs. The Citizens slink away, looking defeated. Only Brutus and Sicinius remain.)

Sicinius: That guy Martius is the most arrogant son-of-a-bitch on earth.

Brutus: Tell me about it. Personally, I wouldn't be too unhappy if he got killed by the Volsces.

Sicinius: Me neither. Let's see how long Cominius can put up with him.

Brutus: I think Martius doesn't mind being Number Two. I mean, look, if things go wrong, the blame will be on Cominius. And if things go right, Martius will take all the credit—whether he deserves it or not.

Sicinius: Yeah.—Let's get back to the Capitol and listen to the war talk.

Brutus: With you, bro.

(They leave.)

Act 1, Scene 2. *In Corioles, the capital of the Volsces. Aufidius comes in with Senators, a conversation in progress.*

1st Sen: So, then, I take it, my lord Aufidius, you think the Romans know what we're doing.

Aufidius: Hell, yes. They have their spies, the same as us. In fact, I have this report from one of our men. (*He takes out a letter.*) This was written four days ago. (*Reads*) "Rome is bothered by public protests because of the famine. The Senate has raised a large army, led by Cominius. Also commanding, Caius Martius, your old enemy, who is hated by the people, and Titus Lartius. Their objective is not known for sure, but you should assume they intend to attack you."

1st Sen: Our army's already in the field. We were expecting trouble with the Romans anyway.

Aufidius: That was a mistake. You tipped our hand prematurely. I was hoping to capture as many towns as possible along the way before the Romans realized what was happening.

2nd Sen: My lord, I would suggest you march your forces out now and let us guard Corioles in the event they try to lay seige to the city—which I don't think is likely.

Aufidius: You don't, eh? You may change your mind about that before too long. I have more recent information that part of their army is headed in this direction. I'll take my forces out and try to intercept them. And if I meet Martius, only one of us will return alive.

Senators: May the gods be with you!

Aufidius: And with you. Try to keep your butts out of trouble. See you later.

Senators: Good luck, my lord!

(Aufidius leaves.)

Act 1, Scene 3. *In the house of Volumnia. Curtain up reveals Volumnia and Virgilia sewing.*

Volumnia: What's the matter, daughter? Aren't you happy your husband is away at war?

Virgilia: Please, madam.

Volumnia: I would be thrilled if I were in your place. When Martius was just a boy I could tell that he was destined to be a great soldier. I was so happy when he returned from his first battle. He was all decorated with honours.

Virgilia: And what if he had died?

Volumnia: Then I would have been proud for the rest of my life hearing other people speak of him as a hero. A mother lives for such honour.

(Virgilia puts her sewing down and shakes her head. Then a Gentlewoman comes in. [Author's note: She is an attendant or waiting-lady.]

Gentlewoman (To Volumnia): Madam, Lady Valeria is here.

Virgilia (To Volumnia): Let me retire. You can entertain her.

Volumnia: No, no. Stay. She may have some news about Martius.—Ah, I can just see him now on the battlefield, killing barbarians left and right and shouting at his troops “Come on, you slackers! Don't you want a piece of this action?”—Ha!

Virgilia: I feel sick.

Volumnia: Where's your spirit, girl? *(To the Gentlewoman)* Tell Valeria to come in.

Gentlewoman: Yes, madam.

(The Gentlewoman leaves.)

Virgilia: I hope he doesn't meet up with Aufidius.

Volumnia: I hope he does. He'll chop him into a thousand pieces.

(Valeria comes in.)

Valeria: Hello, ladies. How are you?

Volumnia and Virgilia: Fine.—Very well, thank you.

Valeria (To Virgilia): And how is little Martius?

Virgilia: He's fine. He's going to look just like his father when he grows up. You should have seen him chasing butterflies the other day. He would catch them and then let them go and then chase after them again.

Volumnia: He'll be a great soldier—like his father.

Valeria (To Virgilia): Would you like to come out with me today? There's a sick lady I want to visit.

Virgilia: I'm not budging until Martius is back safe and sound.

Valeria: Aw, come on. I have some good news about him.

Virgilia: Already?

Valeria: Yes. I overheard a senator talking about the war, and he said Cominius was attacking the Volscian army in the field and your husband and Titus Lartius have gone straight to Corioles to lay siege to it.

Virgilia: You call that good news?

Volumnia: Of course, it's good news.

(Virgilia appears faint.)

Virgilia: If you don't mind, I'd rather not go out.

(Volumnia gets up.)

Volumnia: I'll go with you. She's too gloomy to make good company right now.

Valeria: Virgilia, are you sure?

Virgilia: Yes, yes. You go on without me.

Valeria: All right, then. See you later.

Virgilia: Goodbye.

(Valeria and Volumnia leave.)

Act 1, Scene 4. *Before the gates of Corioles. Martius, Titus Lartius, and Soldiers carrying ladders come in; also a Trumpeter.*

Martius: Here it is—Corioles, capital of the Volscians! We'll storm it! Everyone ready?

All: Yes! Yes!

(A Messenger comes in.)

Messenger (To Martius): General, Cominius and the Volscian army are in the field about a mile and a half away. You can just barely see them.

Martius: Have they engaged yet?

Messenger: Not yet.

Martius (To the Soldiers): All right, listen up! We're going to take Corioles as fast as possible and then get out in the field and reinforce Cominius. *(To the Trumpeter)* Sound a parley.

(The Trumpeter blows. Two Senators appear on the wall.)

Martius (To the Senators): Is Tullus Aufidius inside the city?

1st Sen: No. He's out in the field with his army. *(Distant sounds of battle are heard.)* He's beating your forces!

Martius: Like hell, he is! Surrender the city now!

1st Sen: No! We will not! Get lost, Romans!

Martius (To his Soldiers): Put up the ladders! Without Aufidius, they can't stop us!

(Suddenly the gates open and Volscian Soldiers rush out and attack.)

Martius: Fight 'em, boys! Fight 'em!

(There is much confused fighting. The Romans are beaten back, chased offstage by the Volscians, who pursue.)

Senators (Calling): Fuck you, Romans!

(The Senators leave from the wall, laughing.)

Act 1, Scene 5. [Author's note: Of the two texts I'm referring to, Oxford has a scene break here, but Penguin doesn't. For the rest of Act One, the scenes are intended to follow quickly.] Same setting. The gates of Corioles are closed, and Martius is returning, shouting behind him. The suggestion is that the Volscians have gone back inside after chasing the Romans away.

Martius: Come on, you wimps! You call yourselves Romans? Are you going to let yourselves get chased by a bunch of barbarians? Come on! Follow me!

(The gates open again, and the Volscians come out to fight. Martius single-handedly drives them back inside the gates, which close behind him. Several Roman Soldiers come in, tentatively.)

1st Soldier: Martius is trapped inside! Should we force our way in?

2nd Soldier: No way! I'm not going in there!

3rd Soldier: He's a goner. It's too late to save him.

(Titus Lartius comes in with Soldiers carrying ladders.)

Lartius: Where's Martius?

1st Soldier: In there (Pointing). He chased the Volsces inside and they shut the gates behind him.

Lartius: Oh, God!—Martius!—We've got to get in and save him!

(The gates open. Martius, bloody, is fighting the Volsces.)

Lartius: He's alive! Come on, men!

(The Romans rush into the gates.)

Act 1, Scene 6. Inside Corioles. Several Roman Soldiers come in carrying loot.

1st Soldier: Look what I got! Gold!

(He shows off some object made of gold.)

2nd Soldier: And I got this! Look at these jewels!

(He shows off some object covered with gemstones.)

3rd Soldier (Coming in last): I got this art treasure!

(He shows off a cheap bust of Elvis. Distant alarms of fighting beyond the city. Martius comes in with Titus Lartius.)

Martius (Shouting): Is this what you came for—booty? We're not finished yet! Get out of here, you bums!

(The Soldiers leave. More distant alarms.)

Lartius: Sounds like Cominius has his hands full with Aufidius.

Martius: Listen, you take half our men and secure the town. I'll take the rest and go help Cominius.

Lartius: You can't fight in that condition.

Martius: It's just a scratch.

Lartius: That's an awful lot of blood.

Martius: So what? It'll scare the shit out of the Volsces—ha!

Lartius: The gods must be on your side today.

Martius: Yours, too. Don't worry. I'll see you later.

(Martius leaves. Some Roman Soldiers come in from within the city.)

Lartius: To the marketplace! Secure the town!

(They all leave.)

Act 1, Scene 7. *On the field. A trumpet is sounding a retreat. Cominius and Soldiers come in, retreating.*

Cominius: Don't worry, men. We'll be all right. This is just a tactical retreat. The Volscs know they're in a fight. We'll regroup and attack them again. Our forces at Corioles must have taken the town by now.

(Martius comes in slowly, drenched in blood. He is grinning.)

Cominius: Who is that?—It looks like—

Martius: Am I too late for the party?

Cominius: Martius! My god, you're covered in blood!

Martius: Volscian blood!—Ha!

(Martius and Cominius embrace.)

Cominius: Did you take Corioles?

Martius: Of course. Titus Lartius has the town under control. The Volscs drove us back at first, and my men got scared, but I went back and attacked by myself and they followed me in. What's your situation here?

Cominius: Aufidius is leading the soldiers of Antium, his home town.

Martius: We can beat them. Give me your bravest men and point me in the right direction, and I'll beat those bastards.

Cominius: I believe you. But a general shouldn't look so bloody. I wish you could take a bath first.

Martius: Ha! I love Volscian blood! I could swim in it! *(To the Soldiers)* What do you say, men? Do you want to get bloody with the blood of the Volscs?

Soldiers: Yes!

Martius: I can't hear you!

Soldiers (Louder): Yes!

Martius: Do you love this war?

Soldiers: Yes!

Martius: Are you ready to kill?

Soldiers: Yes!

Martius: Then I will be your sword!

(The Soldiers cheer and shout.)

Cominius: Men, victory is yours—and the spoils of war!

(Cheering and shouting as Martius leads the Soldiers out.)

Act 1, Scene 8. *Outside the gates of Corioles. Titus Lartius comes out of the city with his Lieutenant [i.e., second-in-command], Soldiers, and a Scout.*

Lartius: Lieutenant, you know your orders. Keep all the gates well-guarded. I have to go back and support Cominius and Martius. If I need help from you, I'll send a message. We have to make sure the Volsces are beaten in the field, otherwise we'll never hold on to the town.

Lieut: I understand, General. You can count on me.

Lartius: Shut the gates behind us and keep them shut.

Lieut: Yes, sir!

(The Lieutenant reenters the gates and is closing them as the scene ends.)

Lartius: Where's my scout?—You.—You know the way. Get us to the other camp.

(They all leave, the Scout and Lartius leading.)

Act 1, Scene 9. *The battlefield. Sounds of battle. Martius and Aufidius come in from opposite sides.*

Martius: Aufidius! Now at last I get to kill you!

Aufidius: Martius! I've been waiting for this!

(The two men duel vigorously. Then several Volsces come in to help Aufidius, but they are clumsy and get in his way.)

Aufidius: You're in my way, damn it!

(Martius drives them all out and pursues.)

Act 1, Scene 10. *On the field. A heroic trumpet flourish. Cominius and Soldiers come in from one side and meet Martius and other Soldiers coming in from the other. Martius has his left arm in a sling.*

Cominius: Are you hurt bad?

Martius: Not much. Aufidius took a lot worse from me.

Cominius: Martius, I have to say you've been more than heroic. You've been spectacular. When I make my report in Rome, every citizen will thank the gods that Rome has such a soldier.

Martius: Don't flatter me. Only my mother is allowed to do that. Anyway, I'm disappointed I didn't kill Aufidius.

Cominius: Never mind that. This has been a great victory, and I'm going to see to it that the Senate gives you proper recognition. But right now I'm going to give you a more material reward. You can have one-tenth of the spoils—and that'll be a lot.

Martius: Thank you, General, but I don't need any spoils. I fight for honour. That's my reward. Let the soldiers have my share of the spoils.

(The Soldiers cheer.)

Cominius: If you go back to Rome with nothing to show for your heroism, I will feel personally embarrassed as your commander-in-chief. So I'm giving you my best horse—with all the trim. And don't you dare say no.

Martius: Thank you very much, sir.

Cominius: And—to recognize your victory at Corioles, you shall now be known as Caius Martius Coriolanus.

(A drum roll, and the Soldiers cheer. [Author's note: From this point on, Martius' speech prefix will be "Coriolanus."])

Coriolanus (To the Soldiers): You can't tell with all the blood on my face, but I think I'm blushing.—General, I will do right by your horse, and I will do honour to my new name.

Cominius: Good. Now let's get you cleaned up. You want to look good when we get back to Rome.

(They all leave.)

Act 1, Scene 11. *Elsewhere on the field. Tullus Aufidius, bloody, comes in with some of his Soldiers.*

Aufidius: The Romans have the city.

Soldier: We'll get it back, sir.

Aufidius: No chance. We'll have to negotiate to get it back, but it'll be on their terms.—That goddamn Martius has beaten me five times on the battlefield. From now on, no more fair fighting. If I can beat him with some kind of trick, I will.—You—go check out the city and size up the Roman forces and see how many hostages they're holding.

Soldier: Yes, General.

Aufidius: I'll be at the cypress grove conferring with my staff. Meet me there.

Soldier: Yes, General.

(The leave, the Soldier separately.)

Act 2, Scene 1. *[Author's note: Shakespeare left a serious glitch in the original play. Titus Lartius appears in this scene, but he is supposed to have stayed behind in Corioles to negotiate with the Volscians. So he is in two places at once. I have done my best to smooth this over.] A street in Rome. Menenius comes in with the tribunes Sicinius and Brutus.*

Menenius: The soothsayer says we'll be getting news about Martius.

Brutus: Good or bad?

Menenius: That I don't know. Why, are you hoping for bad news?

Brutus: No, no.

Menenius: The plebeians are probably hoping for bad news.

Sicinius: The common people have their instincts about who their friends and enemies are—just the way animals do.

Menenius: An apt comparison.—You don't like him, do you?

Sicinius: Well—

Menenius: Tell me, what fault does he have that you don't have?

Sicinius: He's too proud.

Brutus: He brags.

Sicinius: He's full of himself.

Brutus: Yes. And he loves power.

Menenius: Uh-huh.—Well, I can tell you that you are not exactly held in high esteem by the nobles.

Sicinius and Brutus (Offended): Why?—What do you mean?

Menenius: Ah, look who's proud now.

Sicinius and Brutus: Oh!—Oh!

Menenius: Am I pissing you off? Too bad. Any little thing pisses you off.

Brutus: We stand with many who dislike Martius.

Sicinius: Indeed, we do.

Menenius: People like you always stand with many. You wouldn't have the guts to stand alone, the way Martius does.

Sicinius and Brutus: Oh!—Oh!

Menenius: Just look in the mirror and you'll see two fools as big as any in Rome.

Sicinius: Some people think you're a fool, too.

Menenius: I trust my reputation enough that I allow it to precede me wherever I go. I speak plainly, I stay up late, and I have my little indulgences.

Brutus: We know about you, Menenius.—(*To Sicinius*) Don't we?

Sicinius: We sure do.

Menenius: You two don't know anything. You're supposed to be magistrates and you spend two days hearing a complaint between a fishmonger and a laundress. You have no brains.

Brutus: You think you're so smart with all your educated talk over the dinner table, but in the Senate you're really a nobody.

Menenius: You are annoying little men who were nothing until recently. Now you have a little bit of power, and it's gone to your heads. Your cleverest words are like bird shit falling to the ground. And as for Martius, he is superior to you and all your ancestors put together.—I take my leave you. Good evening.

(Menenius starts to leave but meets Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria coming in. Brutus and Sicinius stand aside. [Virgilia will be very serious throughout this scene.]

Menenius: Ah! The three fairest and noblest ladies in Rome. How are you?

Volumnia: We are well, sir. Martius is back in Rome. He's coming now.

Menenius: Wonderful! The soothsayer was right.

Volumnia: And everyone's cheering for him—including the plebeians.

Menenius: Ah—indeed! *(With a sideways look at Sicinius and Brutus)* That's excellent. I'm not at all surprised.

Volumnia: We got letters from him. You'll find one at your house waiting for you.

Menenius: I look forward to reading it. Tell me, is he wounded?

(Overlapping replies)

Virgilia: No! No!

Volumnia: Yes, yes—and I thank the gods for it. It's glorious.

Menenius: But he won the battle?

Volumnia: Of course, he won. He always wins.

Menenius: Did he run into Aufidius?

Volumnia: They fought, but Aufidius got away—badly wounded, of course.

Menenius: So I take it the Senate has the news by now?

Volumnia: Yes. Cominius sent them letters and he described how Martius practically won the battle all by himself. It's the greatest victory of his life.

Menenius: Where was he wounded?

Volumnia: In the left arm and shoulder and a few other places. He'll have some big scars to show off to the people.—*(A significant look to Virgilia)* When the time comes.

(Trumpet flourish. Coming in are Cominius and Titus Lartius, with Coriolanus between them, wearing a garland, plus Captains and Soldiers, and a Herald. The trumpet blows for the Herald.)

Herald: Let all Rome know that Caius Martius fought the Volsces at the town of Corioles and conquered it. For this heroic deed, he shall be given the honourary name of Coriolanus!

(Cheering and applause.)

Coriolanus: Please, you don't have to applaud.

Cominius: I think your mother's happy.

(Coriolanus kneels before his mother and kisses her hand.)

Coriolanus: I'm sure you begged the gods to give me victory.

Volumnia: Oh, I prayed, but you still did it.—My son the soldier. *(He rises.)* And now you're Coriolanus, are you? I'll have to get used to that.—Now greet your wife.

(Coriolanus embraces his wife in a restrained way. The suggestion is that she is secondary to his mother.)

Coriolanus: You're so quiet, Virgilia. How would you be if I'd come home in a coffin? *(To Valeria)* And Valeria! It's wonderful to see you, too.

Valeria: Welcome back, hero!

Menenius: All three generals are heroes. And I hope all of Rome celebrates and gets drunk!—*(Sideways look at Brutus and Sicinius)* except for a few gourches who suffer from indigestion.

Coriolanus: Let's go, ladies. *(He takes Volumnia and Virgilia by the hands.)* We have to visit the nobles before I go home.

Volumnia: Ah, yes, the nobles. I have one last wish to be fulfilled, and I expect that will happen soon. Rome must honour you as you deserve.

Coriolanus: Oh, please, mother. I'd rather serve in my own way as a soldier than in somebody else's way.

Cominius: On to the Capitol!

(A trumpet flourish. All leave except Brutus and Sicinius, who return to centre stage.)

Brutus: I can see what's coming.

Sicinius: He'll be made Consul of Rome.

Brutus: That won't be good for us.

Sicinius: However—as much as he may be a war hero, he was never made for politics. Right now he's got a huge fund of goodwill from the people, but he could lose it very easily.

Brutus: With a little help from us.

Sicinius: Exactly. The people are fickle. They can be manipulated.

Brutus: I know.

Sicinius: He's got to get their approval to be Consul. Can you imagine him going to the marketplace and trying to talk nice to them?

Brutus: Ha! I don't think he can do it. I don't think he can hide his attitude.

Sicinius: And we'll remind them, if necessary, how he really feels about them.

Brutus: If he's true to his character, he'll never be Consul.

Sicinius: Let's hope so.

Brutus: Let's go back to the Capitol and see what happens.

Sicinius: With you, bro.

(They leave.)

Act 2, Scene 2. *In the Capitol. A trumpet flourish. Coming are the Senators, Cominius, Menenius, and Coriolanus, followed by Sicinius and Brutus, and finally an Officer who remains at the door. The Senators sit; Sicinius and Brutus sit apart from them. Cominius, Menenius, and Coriolanus remain standing. Cominius whispers to Menenius, prompting him to speak.*

Menenius: Most honoured senators—and honoured tribunes—after having come to very favourable terms with the Volsces, our last item of business is to acknowledge the exemplary service of Caius Martius Coriolanus. And for that, there is no one better suited to speak than our present Consul and commander-in-chief, Cominius.

(Menenius signals Coriolanus to sit.)

1st Senator: Speak, Cominius, and leave nothing out. (To Sicinius and Brutus) And we want you to pay close attention and give a favourable report to the people.

Sicinius: We shall be glad to, sir.

Brutus: If Coriolanus shows a little more affection to the people than he has in the past.

Menenius: Stop it. You're being impertinent. Just listen to Cominius.

Brutus: I'll listen, sir. But my remark was quite pertinent.

Menenius: Coriolanus loves the people well enough. He doesn't have to get into bed with them.—Cominius, we're all ready to listen to you.

(Coriolanus gets up.)

Coriolanus: Excuse me. It might be better if I left the room.

Menenius: No, no. Sit down.

1st Senator: Don't leave now, sir. Don't you want to hear Cominius talk about your exploits?

Coriolanus: To be perfectly honest, no. My wounds will heal faster if I'm not reminded of how I got them.

Brutus: I hope I haven't offended you, sir.

Coriolanus: Hell, you can say what you like. And as far as the—plebeians—go, they have as much of my affection as they deserve.

Menenius (*Interjecting quickly*): Yes, yes, all right. Just have a seat.

Coriolanus: Really, I have no interest in hearing my service as a soldier exaggerated. I'll just step outside.—Excuse me, gentlemen.

(*Coriolanus leaves.*)

Menenius (*To the Senators*): See how he is? Now that's a real hero. He'd rather risk his life on the battlefield than be praised for it afterwards.—*Cominius*, we are ready to hear from you.

Cominius: Thank you.—Gentlemen, I can hardly find words to do justice to *Coriolanus*. We Romans hold courage to be the greatest of all virtues. And no one in the world can match *Coriolanus* for courage. When he was only sixteen, he fought against the last of the tyrant kings, Tarquin. And although it was his first battle, everyone was astonished by the way he fought—like an experienced soldier. He outshined everyone. And he has done the same in seventeen battles since. At Corioles he turned defeat into victory. He stormed the town by himself, slaying Volscs left and right. His men were emboldened by his example, and Corioles was taken. But he wasn't through yet. Despite his exhaustion and wounds, he returned to the field where the rest of us were fighting Aufidius and his brigade, and he routed them, sealing the victory for Rome.

(*The Senators burst into enthusiastic applause and cheers.*)

Menenius: Is he not worthy, my lords?

1st Senator: He is more than worthy.

Senators: A Consul! A Consul!

Cominius: And let me add that he refused to take any of the spoils of war. He let his soldiers have his share. He doesn't care about material rewards. He believes in service for the sake of service.

1st Senator: Call him back in here. We have to nominate him as Consul.

Senators: Yes! Yes!

(*The Officer at the door nods and steps out. He returns immediately with Coriolanus.*)

Menenius: *Coriolanus*, the Senate has decided to name you Consul.

Coriolanus: Thank you, my lords. My life belongs to Rome—in service.

Menenius: All that remains is for you to speak to the people and get their approval.

1st Senator: Yes. That's the custom. You'll have to put on a gown of humility and go down to the marketplace and talk to them and convince them that you'd be a good Consul.

Coriolanus: Well—if it's all the same to you, I'd rather skip that part. (*Sicinius gives Brutus a significant tap on the arm.*) I mean, the idea of dressing down to their level, so to speak, and showing off my war wounds, and asking for their approval—well—it's rather degrading, isn't it?

Sicinius: Sir, the people must be given the opportunity to approve or disapprove. You can't just skip it.

Menenius: Yes. The tribune is right. Just go through with it, even if you don't want to. All the Consuls have had to do it.

Coriolanus: I would feel phony about it. It's a bad custom, if you ask me. We could do without it.

Sicinius and Brutus: Oh!—Oh!

Coriolanus: I mean, I didn't do all that fighting just to gain the approval of the plebes. Am I supposed to pitch myself like a politician? You know I'm not like that.

Sicinius (Aside to Brutus): Told you.

Brutus (Aside to Sicinius): I told you.

Menenius: Please don't make an issue of it. It's just routine. (*To the Senators*) He'll do it, don't worry.—Tribunes, please inform the people of the Senate's choice.—And to our new Consul we wish all happiness and honour.

Senators: Hear! Hear!

(The Senators stand and applaud. There is a trumpet flourish and all leave, except for Sicinius and Brutus.)

Brutus: This should be something.

Sicinius: Yeah. An attitude that big can't be covered by any gown of humility.

Brutus: That's for sure. Let's go to the marketplace and give the people the news.

Sicinius: With you, bro.

(They leave.)

Act 2, Scene 3. *On the street. Seven or eight Citizens come in. A conversation is already in progress.*

1st Citizen: Okay, no more arguing. If he asks us to support him, we will.

2nd Citizen: We're not obligated, you know.

3rd Citizen: Of course, we're not obligated, but look. The guy's a war hero, right? If we turn him down, how does that make us look? Like ungrateful bastards, that's how.

2nd Citizen: Well, I don't know.

3rd Citizen: It's going to be a majority vote anyway. Listen, the best thing is not to meet him all at once but in two or threes. That way he have a better chance to size him up. All right?

2nd Citizen: That's a good idea. Let's take a little walk and plan this.

(The Citizens leave. Then Coriolanus comes in, dressed in a gown of humility and a poor man's cap. He is accompanied by Menenius.)

Coriolanus: I feel like a fucking fool.

Menenius: Oh, come on, it's nothing. It's just a little custom. You say a few nice words to the plebes and it's all settled.

Coriolanus: What am I supposed to say to these mangy mutts?—"Oh, please give me your votes. Here, look at my war wounds. I got them fighting honourably while some of your friends and relatives turned and ran like a bunch of fucking—"

Menenius: For God's sake, don't talk like that! I swear, for a guy who does everything right on the battlefield, you're totally left-footed when it comes to politics.

Coriolanus: You know why? Because fighting is honest. It's always honest. But politics is bullshit, and it's always bullshit.

Menenius: Look, this is for the consulship! The highest position in Rome! You're this close to it! *(Indicates with thumb and forefinger.)* This matters just as much as winning a battle. Just be polite. You've got to stroke them.

Coriolanus: I'd rather hang them.

Menenius: Please—listen to an older man. I'm your mentor, and I'm your friend, too. I'm telling you—put your feelings in your back pocket and keep them out of sight.

Coriolanus: There's no pocket in this fucking sack.

(Menenius gives Coriolanus a pat of encouragement.)

Menenius: You can do it. Just put your mind to it. Just be polite. And remember that this is a gown of humility. For a noble to wear such a gown and walk among the plebes, it means he identifies with them—he cares about them.—Okay, I'll leave you to it.

(Menenius leaves. Coriolanus frowns, looking at his gown. Then three Citizens come in.)

3rd Citizen: Greetings, sir.

Coriolanus: Greetings, citizens. Well, I suppose you know why I'm here.

3rd Citizen: Tell us in your own words, sir.

Coriolanus: The Senate has chosen me to be Consul—but I would just as soon not trouble you about it.

3rd Citizen: Well, we want to be sure, sir. You want our support, but we want something, too.

Coriolanus: That figures. All right, what's your price?

1st Citizen: Our price is simply to ask us nicely.

Coriolanus: Fine.—Please—support me as Consul. I've served in battle. I have wounds to prove it. Just don't ask to see them. I don't show them in public.—So, okay, what's it gonna be? Yes or no?

Citizens: Mm—yes—all right.

Coriolanus: Good. That's three votes in the bag. Thank you, and have a nice day.

(The Citizens go out slowly, talking to each other.)

3rd Citizen: That was rather odd.

1st Citizen: Not too friendly.

2nd Citizen: Maybe we shouldn't—nah, never mind.

(The Citizens leave. Then two others come in.)

Coriolanus: Hello, citizens. Here I am in the required gown of humility to beg for your votes. May you find me worthy.

4th Citizen: Sir, I would say that you are worthy and not worthy.

Coriolanus: How do you mean?

4th Citizen: Well, you've been a scourge to the barbarians, but you haven't exactly been our friend.

Coriolanus: I'm more particular about my friends than I am about my enemies.—But knowing the way the common people think, I will gladly say that you are all my beloved brothers, upon whom I smile day and night. Even when I'm in the john contemplating, every little thing reminds me of you. I long so much to be your Consul. Please say yes.

5th Citizen: We just hope you'll be our friend, sir. We'll support you.

4th Citizen: You've got a lot of war wounds, don't you?

Coriolanus: Dozens. But I prefer not to show them.

5th Citizen: May the gods protect you anyway, sir.

(The Citizens leave.)

Coriolanus: Dirty faces and crooked teeth. These people make me sick.—Here's some more.

(Three more Citizens come in.)

Coriolanus: Citizens! For your votes I fought against our enemies. For your votes I took two dozen wounds and fought in eighteen battles. All for your votes, kind citizens. So—will you support me as Consul?

6th Citizen (To the others): How can we say no after all he's done?

7th Citizen: Let him be Consul.

8th Citizen: Yes. Why not?

Citizens: May the gods protect you, sir—our noble Consul.

Coriolanus: Thank you. Thank you. (*Aside*) I knew I could con you.

(*The Citizens leave. Then Menenius comes in with Sicinius and Brutus.*)

Menenius: Well done, sir. The people support you.

Sicinius: Yes—apparently.

Coriolanus: Whew! Glad that's over.

Menenius: All that's left is to return to the Senate for the official ceremony.

Coriolanus: Fine. Can I take off this sack now?

Menenius: Yes, yes. Come along with me. I'll escort you. (*To Sicinius and Brutus*) Coming?

Brutus: We'll catch up with you later.

Sicinius: We just want to mingle with the people.

Menenius: All right.

(*Menenius and Coriolanus leave.*)

Brutus: Looks like he's got it.

Sicinius: Not so fast. The people have been known to change their minds.

(*All the Citizens return.*)

Sicinius: Well! Have you decided to support Coriolanus?

1st Citizen: Yes, we'll vote for him. Why not?

Brutus: I hope you don't regret it later.

2nd Citizen: Actually, I thought he was rather condescending.

3rd Citizen: Yeah, I thought so, too.

1st Citizen: Aw, that's just the way he is.

2nd Citizen: He wouldn't show us his war wounds.

Sicinius: Oh, really!

3rd Citizen: He said he wouldn't show them in public. As if we're not good enough to look at them. I thought he treated us with some contempt. He was, like—"What's it gonna be? Yes or no?" And then—"Have a nice day."

Sicinius: Then why did you agree to support him?

3rd Citizen: I don't know. The guy's a war hero, you know? It just seemed like the right thing to do.

Brutus: We told you guys what to say to him, didn't we? We told you to remind him that he was always against you, that he was always down on the people. And when you were hungry and wanted food, he didn't care if you starved.

Some Citizens: Yeah, yeah.

Brutus: And if he loved you at all, he would've been really sweet to you when he came to ask for your support. You should have said that to him right to his face.

Sicinius: Then you would've gotten a reaction out of him. He would've blown up, and then everyone would've seen exactly what kind of man he is.

Brutus: What do you think he'll be like as Consul? Once he has all that power, he'll crush you. You'll be worse off than you are now.

Sicinius: Do you really want him as Consul?

1st Citizen: Well, it's too late now, isn't it?

Sicinius: No. You can change your minds.

1st Citizen: Can we?

Brutus: Yes. He hasn't had the ceremony yet.

(The Citizens huddle for a moment, murmuring.)

1st Citizen (To the Tribunes): Okay, then. We want to change our votes. We don't want him as Consul.

Sicinius: Fine. Just pass the word to everyone and meet outside the Senate.

2nd Citizen: I'm going to tell everyone I know.

Other Citizens: Yeah.—Me, too.

Brutus: Okay. Great. But make sure—and this is important—make sure to say that you only voted for him at the beginning because Sicinius and I urged you to.

Sicinius: Right. Brutus and I were totally in favour of Coriolanus, and you went along with us just to be nice. But afterwards, when you thought about it yourselves with your own free minds, you decided it would be a mistake.

Citizens: Yes! Yes!

Brutus: Okay, scoot. Spread the word.

(The Citizens rush out.)

Brutus: The shit's gonna hit the fan at the Senate. You'll see. Coriolanus will blow up like a volcano.

Sicinius: Power to the people!—Right?

Brutus: You said it.

Sicinius: Come on. We gotta be firemen—and make sure there's a good fire—ha!

(They leave.)

Act 3, Scene 1. *The Senate-house.* Coming in leisurely are the Senators, Coriolanus, dressed formally as Consul, Menenius, Cominius, Titus Lartius, and other Nobles. [Author's note: Once again Shakespeare presents us with a little problem with Titus Lartius, the general who can be in two places at once. In this scene, the inference is unavoidable that Lartius has been out of Rome, dealing with the Volsces. Shakespeare gives him a few lines and has him leave for no specific reason. Some directors build out the scene for Lartius' sake, but I'm leaving it alone.]

Coriolanus: Has Aufidius raised a new army?

Lartius: Yes. That's why we made peace with him quickly.

Coriolanus: He could strike us again.

Cominius: I don't think he will. I think the Volsces have had their fill of war for a long time to come.

Coriolanus (To *Lartius*): Did you speak to him yourself?

Lartius: Yes. He was angry with his troops for letting him down. And he definitely wants to get even with you personally.

Coriolanus: Where is he now?

Lartius: Antium.

Coriolanus: If I had a good excuse, I'd go out there and fight him one-on-one. Anyway, you did a good job handling the negotiations.

Lartius: Thank you—my lord Consul.

Coriolanus: Lord Consul—ha, ha! I'm getting used to that.

Lartius: I'll see you later.

Coriolanus: All right. Good night.

Lartius: Good night—Generals.

Cominius: Good night.

(*Lartius* leaves. Then *Sicinius* and *Brutus* come in, remaining apart. *Coriolanus* frowns when he sees them.)

Coriolanus (Aside to *Cominius*): The two big-mouths of the people.

Sicinius (Approaching): Sir! I advise you not to go outside dressed as Consul.

Coriolanus: What?

Brutus (Approaching): That's right, sir. The people will be offended.

Menenius: Why should they be offended?

Cominius: They already gave their approval.

(Crowd noise is heard outside.—“No to Coriolanus!”—“No Consul!”—“No!”)

Brutus: Well—originally they approved—but they have since changed their minds.

Coriolanus: You put them up to it! This is your doing!

Brutus: No, no. We were on your side.

Sicinius: That's right, sir. They had second thoughts after you met them in the marketplace, and they agreed that you had the wrong attitude for a Consul. And they remembered that you were against them when they demanded food.

Coriolanus: You reminded them, I'm sure.

Brutus: No, no. Don't blame us.

(More crowd noise is heard.)

Sicinius: You can hear how unhappy they are with you, sir. You should blame yourself.

Menenius: Okay, let's just be calm about this.—Please.—We can talk this over in a nice way.

Cominius: It's pretty obvious that these tribunes have worked the crowd up against Coriolanus. This is not proper. This is not the way the Republic is supposed to work. Coriolanus deserves to be Consul.

(More crowd noise.)

Coriolanus: Bloody plebeians! The more you give them, the less satisfied they are!

Menenius: Please, my friend! Not now!

1st Senator (To Coriolanus): Hush, sir! Please!

Coriolanus: My noble friends, you've all allowed yourselves to be duped by the idea of giving power to the people! *(He spits.)* There! That's what I think of them!

Menenius (Moaning): Oh, God.

1st Senator: Don't make things worse, sir.

Coriolanus: Sharing power with that mob is like letting the bilge rats steer the ship!

Brutus: With an attitude like that, it's no wonder they won't have you.

Sicinius: Sir, it has been decided. You shall not be Consul.

Coriolanus (Mimicking): You shall not be Consul!—Listen to this jerk—the king of the minnows.—You shall not be Consul!—Senators, you made the laws, and what have we got? A mob of morons and a couple of asshole tribunes stirring them up. I say, to hell with the whole idea of having tribunes, and to hell with giving power to the people!

Sicinius: This is treason!

Brutus (To the Senators): You heard what he said! You're all witnesses!

Coriolanus: Eat my shit—brute.

Sicinius: Is this a Consul for Rome? No! This is a traitor!

Brutus (Calling): Officers!

(Two Officers rush in.)

Brutus: Call in the people! We are arresting Coriolanus for treason!

(The Officers rush out.)

Sicinius: Sir! In the name of the people, I arrest you as a traitor!

(Sicinius tries to seize Coriolanus, who punches him in the nose, knocking him down.)

Coriolanus: You turd!

Sicinius: Help! Help! Citizens! Citizens!

(A mob of Citizens rushes in, followed by the Officers. The Senators and other Nobles immediately stand in front of Coriolanus to protect him.)

Menenius: No violence! No violence! Please! Let us reason together!

Sicinius (Getting up, pointing to Coriolanus): You see that man? He's the one who would take away all your rights and freedoms! He wants to be a tyrant over you!

Citizens: No!—Never!

Brutus: Officers, seize him!

(There is confused fighting, but without weapons. The Citizens and Officers struggle with the Senators and Nobles. Coriolanus stands apart. He reaches for his sword, but Menenius stops him from drawing it.)

Menenius: Tribunes! Make them stop!—Sicinius! For God's sake!

Sicinius: Stop, citizens! Stop the fighting! Stop!

(The fighting stops.)

Sicinius: Let me speak.

A Citizen: All right, tribune. Speak.

Sicinius: This man—Caius Martius—whom you originally supported as Consul—will take all your freedom from you.

Citizens: No! No!

Menenius: Shame on you, Sicinius!

1st Senator: Think of the city!

Sicinius: The people are the city.

Citizens: Yes! Yes!

Brutus: We are the people's tribunes. We have been chosen by them.

Citizens: Yes! Yes!

Menenius: Yes, of course, you are the tribunes. No one is disputing that.

Coriolanus: This is how the Republic will end—with evil tribunes and stupid people.

Sicinius: You hear that? That's treason. And what is the penalty? Death?

Citizens: Death! Death! Death!

Brutus: The people speak.

Menenius: Wait! Wait! Wait!—Please, tribunes. Let me speak.

Brutus: Go ahead.

Menenius: If you care about Rome, you don't resort to violence.

Brutus: Where the threat is great, the remedy must be greater.

(Coriolanus draws his sword.)

Coriolanus: You won't take me alive. I'll kill a hundred of you bastards first.

Sicinius: You see what a threat he is? This proves my point!

Brutus: We have no choice!—Officers! Citizens!

(The Citizens and Officers attempt to get to Coriolanus, but this time the Senators and Nobles draw their swords and drive the mob out.)

Menenius (To Coriolanus): You've got to go home. You're not safe here.

Coriolanus: Why should I run? We have as many friends as enemies.

1st Senator: Oh, no, please! We don't want a civil war! You should go home. We'll deal with this situation—somehow.

Cominius: He's right. I'll walk with you.

Coriolanus: They're just like barbarians. They're not true Romans.

Cominius: This is not the time for a confrontation. We don't want this to blow up.

Menenius: Take him home, Cominius. I'll try to figure out how to patch this quarrel over.

Cominius: Right.—Come on.

(Cominius links arms with Coriolanus and leads him out.)

2nd Senator (Shaking his head): And he was this close (*Indicates with fingers*) to being Consul. And you know what I think? He blew it.

Menenius: He wasn't cut out for politics. He's too blunt—and inflexible.

(Crowd noise is heard again.)

2nd Senator: I think they're back.

(Sicinius, Brutus, and the Citizens return, but the Citizens are more restrained. The suggestion is that the tribunes control them.)

Sicinius: Where is that traitor?

Menenius: Tribune, please—

Sicinius: Treason cannot go unpunished. We have laws—to protect the people.

Citizens: Yes! Yes!

Menenius: Tribune, remember your place. You speak for the people, but you don't administer the law for serious offenses.

Sicinius: Obviously, you're on his side.

Menenius: Listen, I've known the Consul all his life—his virtues as well as his faults.

Sicinius: Consul? And who would that be?

Menenius: Coriolanus.

Brutus: He's not Consul.

Citizens: No! No!

Sicinius: The people have decided he must die tonight.

Citizens: Yes!—Yes!—He dies!

Menenius: Citizens, please!—Hear me out. What you are asking for offends the gods. And it's—it's un-Roman. Rome does not execute a hero to whom it owes so much.

Sicinius: He was a hero before—but now he's a threat. (*To the Citizens*) Did he not threaten to kill us?

Citizens: Yes! Yes!

Menenius: He was just reacting like a soldier. Now listen—you must meet us half-way on this. I will arrange to have Coriolanus brought before the people so he can answer the accusations against him.

1st Senator: Yes. That's the proper thing to do. Otherwise, there'll be a civil war. You don't want that, do you?

(Sicinius and Brutus exchange a significant look. The suggestion is that they have no choice but to concede.)

Sicinius: All right, Menenius. We'll leave it with you. You can be the people's officer. *(To the Citizens)* All right, citizens. We're going to leave peacefully. We'll meet in the marketplace. *(To Menenius)* You bring him there. If he doesn't show up, the people will deal with him in their own way.

(The Tribunes and Citizens leave.)

Menenius (To the Senators): Come with me. I may need some help.

Senators: Yes, yes.

(Menenius and the Senators and Nobles leave.)

Act 3, Scene 2. *The house of Coriolanus. Coriolanus comes in with some Nobles, a conversation already in progress.*

Coriolanus: Bloody tribunes! Bloody plebeians! Fuck 'em all both! I'm not giving in to them!

(Volumnia comes in, looking serious and disapproving.)

Coriolanus: Mother, before you start lecturing me, don't lecture me, okay?

Volumnia: You let them push your button, didn't you?

Coriolanus: Okay, so maybe I did.

Volumnia: Sometimes the greater strength is in self-restraint.

Coriolanus: They can all drop dead.

Volumnia: I agree with you, but this is politics, not the battlefield.

(Menenius and the Senators come in.)

Menenius: You blew up at them. That was absolutely the wrong thing to do.

Coriolanus: Maybe.

Menenius: You've got to meet with them again and apologize.

Coriolanus: Fat chance.

1st Senator: There's a lot riding on this, sir. This will affect the whole city. We need you.

Volumnia: Listen to them, son—and to me. We all have feelings, but as we get older we learn to balance them with good sense.

Menenius: Well said, madam.

Coriolanus: What do you expect me to do?

Menenius: Go back to the tribunes. Say you're sorry. You didn't mean what you said. You got carried away. And say it to the people as well.

Coriolanus: Why should I say I'm sorry when I'm not?

Volumnia: You're being stubborn now.

Coriolanus: That's how I won so many battles—by being stubborn.

Volumnia: Son, listen to me. Look at it this way. If you were at war and you had an opportunity to take a city with words only, wouldn't you do it?

Coriolanus: Yes.

Volumnia: Even if those words were a deception?

Coriolanus: I suppose.—Yes. Why not?

Volumnia: All right, then. Think of the tribunes and the plebeians the same way. You want something—the consulship. You won't get it by fighting them, but you can get it by speaking the right way. Even if you don't mean it, so what?

Menenius: She's right. You have to understand how the plebeians think. They're fickle. Their emotions go back and forth. If you apologize to them, they'll forgive you. They supported you until you rubbed them the wrong way.

Coriolanus: It was the tribunes who manipulated them, and you know it.

Menenius: All right, I suppose they did. But you can still win the plebeians back.

(*Cominius comes in.*)

Cominius: Hello!

Menenius: What's happening, Cominius?

Cominius: The people are in the marketplace, and they're in a foul mood. (*To Coriolanus*) You either have to go and speak to them calmly and politely—and with a lot of contrition—or don't go at all. And the latter option is worse.

Volumnia: He'll go. Of course, he'll go. (*To Coriolanus*) You have to speak to them very nicely.

Coriolanus: I've never been in such a humiliating position in my whole life. No battle was as bad as this.

Menenius: We'll come with you. It'll be all right.

Volumnia: Do it for me. If you do this, I will praise you more than for any battle you ever won.

Coriolanus (*Gritting his teeth*): All right. I'll do it. I'll be totally insincere and lie through my teeth.

Cominius: Be mild with them.—Mild.

Coriolanus: Oh, yes—mild. That's my nickname—Martius the Mild. I'll be—extremely—mild.—All right, here we go, then—to the marketplace to be extremely mild—with the intelligent and sweet-smelling plebeians and their honourable, altruistic tribunes.

Menenius: That's the spirit!

(Coriolanus leaves, and is followed by Menenius, Cominius, and the Senators.)

Act 3, Scene 3. *At the marketplace. Sicinius and Brutus come in, already in conversation.*

Brutus: That's the way to push his button—accuse him of tyranny. Also, how much he hates the people.

Sicinius: Right, right.

(An Officer comes in.)

Officer: He's coming.

Brutus: Who's with him?

Officer: Menenius, Cominius, and the Senators.

Sicinius: Have you rounded up all the people who hate him the most?

Officer: Yes. I did exactly what you told me to do.

Sicinius: Good. Now you tell them to follow my cues. I'm speaking for them, so they have to back me up.

Officer: Understood.

Sicinius: And I want them to be loud.

Officer: Oh, they'll be loud, don't worry.

Sicinius: Okay. Go.

(The Officer leaves.)

Brutus: We want to make him lose his temper right away. You saw the way he blew up in the Senate-house.

Sicinius: Right.

Brutus: He doesn't want to do this. He's primed for another explosion.

Sicinius: I'm sure he is. And we're going to score points for not calling for the death penalty.

Brutus: Right. We're—what's the word?—magnanimous.

Sicinius: Magnanimous. That's what we are.—Okay, here he comes.

(Coriolanus, Menenius, Cominius, and the Senators come in.)

Menenius (*Aside to Coriolanus*): Remember—be mild.

Coriolanus (*Aside to Menenius*): Yeah, yeah.—*(To the Tribunes)* Greetings, tribunes. May the gods keep all the people safe and give us all peace and love. *(He makes a “peace” sign, which he shares with the audience.)*

1st Senator: Hear! Hear!

Menenius: Very noble! *(He claps.)*

Sicinius: Thank you, sir. The people will hear you now.

(Sicinius turns and gives a signal, and the Officer leads in the Citizens, who are grumbling loudly.)

Officer: Quiet, please! Give your attention to the tribunes.

Coriolanus (*Clearing his throat*): Ahem.—If I may speak.

Sicinius and Brutus: Yes, yes.

Coriolanus: Whatever the problem is, we're going to deal with it here and now, and you're going to stick to what's already been referred to and not invent any new accusations.

Sicinius: Fine. And you agree to submit to the will of the people—whatever it may be.

Coriolanus: Yes.

Menenius: Citizens, if I may speak. Coriolanus is a military hero, as his many wounds prove—

Coriolanus: Forget that.

Menenius: Shh!—*(To the Citizens)* He is a soldier, and he speaks like a soldier, and if he speaks harshly at times, that's just his way of speaking, and you shouldn't take it personally. Heroes don't always express themselves the way—

Cominius (*Aside to Menenius*): Don't make a speech.

Coriolanus: Let's get on with this farce. What's your charge against me?

Sicinius (*Harshly*): The people charge you with treason—

Coriolanus: What!

Menenius: Shh!

Sicinius: In attempting to subjugate them to your will and make yourself a tyrant over them!

Coriolanus: What a crock of shit! May you rot in hell—the whole bloody lot of you!

Citizens (Loudly): Oh!–Oh!–Oh!

Sicinius: You hear that, citizens? Such hatred! Such malice! And you saw him drive us out of the Senate-house!

Citizens: Yes!–Down with him!

Officer: Peace!–Quiet!

(The Citizens quiet down.)

Sicinius: Such a crime of treason could be punished by death.

Brutus: However-taking into account your rather good service to Rome–

Coriolanus: Rather good service! You miserable worm!

Menenius: Shh!

Coriolanus (To Menenius): I want to bash this guy's head in.

Menenius: Please, sir. Think of your mother.

Sicinius: The tribunes have urged moderation on the part of the people, and by their agreement and consent–*(He gives a subtle signal to the Citizens.)*–the punishment shall be–banishment from Rome!

Citizens: Banishment!–Banishment!–Get out of Rome!–Begone!

Cominius: No! No! Wait! Please!

Sicinius: There's nothing more to be said. He is banished. His own words have convicted him.

Cominius: I plead for mercy for him!

Brutus: I'm sorry, sir. The matter is closed.

Coriolanus (To Cominius): Don't waste your breath. If they want me gone, I'll go. *(To the Citizens)* And I'll leave you stupid dogs to your miserable fate! You are your own worst enemies, and you'll find that out the hard way–after you've driven out all your defenders and there's no one left to defend you from the barbarians! I spit on you! I piss on you! I'll go somewhere else and be happier than I could ever be in Rome!

(Coriolanus storms out, followed by his friends.)

Brutus: He was the enemy, and now he's gone!

Citizens: Hooray!–No more Coriolanus!–He's gone!

Sicinius: Follow him to the gates and let him know how glad you are to be rid of him!

(The Citizens leave noisily.)

Brutus: That was great.

Sicinius: It was perfect. (*To the Officer*) Good job.

Officer: Thank you, sir.

Sicinius: You stick with us.—Let's go.

(They all leave in the other direction.)

Act 4, Scene 1. *This scene is deleted.*

Act 4, Scene 2. *On the Street. Sicinius, Brutus, and the Officer come in.*

Brutus: I think from this point on, we want to be—you know—less pushy.

Sicinius: Keep a lower profile. Keep it humble.

Brutus: Exactly.—But I'll tell you, it's great to have such a sense of power.

Sicinius: It sure is. (*To the Officer*) Coriolanus is gone by now, so you can tell the people to go home. And tell them—tell them they should be proud of their strength.

Officer: I will, sir.

(The Officer leaves.)

Brutus: Uh-oh. Here comes his mother.

Sicinius: Better duck. I don't want to see her.

Brutus: Too late.

(Volumnia, Virgilia, and Menenius come in.)

Volumnia: A plague on you tribunes!

Menenius: Please, madam, not so loud.

Volumnia: Why not loud! I've a right to be loud!

Sicinius: We were just going, madam.

(He and Brutus try to go past her, but the two ladies block their path.)

Volumnia: Don't you walk away from me!

Sicinius: I've no desire to listen to a crazy woman.

Volumnia: You miserable bugs! You banished a man who has struck more blows for Rome than you've eaten dinners!

(She slaps the two Tribunes.)

Menenius: Oh, goodness!

Sicinius: She's insane!

Volumnia: I hope my son finds you somewhere where you don't have a mob to protect you, and then he'll chop you to pieces.

Menenius: Madam—please.

Sicinius: If your son hadn't alienated the people, he'd still be here.

Volumnia: It was you two who roused the mob against him! A mob of idiots! White trash!

Brutus (*To Sicinius*): I think we've heard enough.

Volumnia: I hope you're proud of yourselves. You brave tribunes. You're not worthy to lick my son's shoes.

(*Brutus and Sicinius leave.*)

Volumnia (*Calling after them*): I curse you to the gods! I will curse you every day for the rest of my life!

Menenius: They're gone, madam. You certainly told them off. I hope they're very ashamed of themselves.—Em, will you come to my house for dinner?

Volumnia: I don't want food. My anger is my food—and I will starve by feeding.—Come, Virgilia. We're in this together.

(*Volumnia and Virgilia leave.*)

Menenius: Tsk—this is terrible.

(*He leaves.*)

Act 4, Scene 3. *Somewhere between Rome and Antium. Nicanor, a Roman traitor, and Adrian, a Volscian spy, come in cautiously from opposite sides. They stop when they see each other. Nicanor recognizes Adrian first.*

Nicanor (*Cheerfully*): Hey—Volsce!

Adrian (*Warily*): Roman.

(*Nicanor approaches.*)

Nicanor: I know you.

Adrian: Do you now?

Nicanor: You're Adrian. You're a spy. (*Adrian reacts nervously.*) Hey, relax. You know me.

Adrian: Do I?

Nicanor: A spy should recognize a traitor when they're on the same side.

(*Nicanor is smiling, so Adrian relaxes. He is trying to remember Nicanor's name.*)

Adrian: Oh—yeah. You're, em—em—begins with an “N”—

Nicanor: Nicanor.

Adrian: Nicanor! That's it.

(They shake hands and slap each other on the shoulder.)

Nicanor: What are you doing out here?

Adrian: What am I doing? I was sent to find out what's going on in Rome. What else would I be doing?

Nicanor: Then it's a good thing you bumped into me. We can save each other a long walk.

Adrian: Okay, so what's happening in Rome?

Nicanor: A lot of trouble. The plebes banished Coriolanus, and the nobles are pissed off about it.

Adrian: Wow! He's banished? For what?

Nicanor: Treason, supposedly. But it's all bullshit. The tribunes didn't like him, and they were working the mob up against him, and there was a blow-up in the marketplace. Of course, he didn't help himself much with that big mouth of his. He hates the plebes, and he makes it obvious.

Adrian: We heard rumours that something was going on, so Aufidius started making preparations for war again.

Nicanor: I'd say his timing is good. With Coriolanus gone, Rome is very divided right now. It's not a civil war or anything, but there's a lot of bad feelings bubbling under the surface.

Adrian: Aufidius will be glad to hear it.

Nicanor: And I'm glad to be the one to tell you. Listen, come back to my house for supper and I'll give you all the news.

Adrian: Excellent.—Hey, you can expect a nice reward for this.

Nicanor: Good, because I like rewards.

(They leave, in the direction of Rome.)

Act 4, Scene 4. Antium. Coriolanus comes in disguised in poor clothes and muffled.

Coriolanus: So this is Antium. Nice town. God knows how many widows I've made here.

(A Citizen comes in, passing by.)

Coriolanus: My friend!

Citizen: Eh?

Coriolanus: Can you tell me where is the house of Aufidius?

Citizen (Pointing): That's the house, sir.

Coriolanus: Thank you, my friend.

Citizen: You're welcome, sir.

(The Citizen goes out.)

Coriolanus: Rome must be punished. And who's going to help me do it? Aufidius.

(He leaves.)

Act 4, Scene 5. *The entrance hall of the house of Aufidius. Two Servants pass back and forth across the stage, carrying trays. Heard within are sounds of a dinner party.*

1st Servant: We need more wine.

2nd Servant: Yes, yes.

(Both Servants are briefly gone when Coriolanus comes in.)

Coriolanus: Nice house. *(Sniffs the air)* Smells good.

(The First Servant comes in, passing through, and pauses.)

1st Servant: Who are you? You can't come in here. Get out.

(The First Servant leaves.)

Coriolanus: He thinks I'm a bum.

(The Second Servant comes in, passing through, and pauses.)

2nd Servant: We don't feed beggars. Get lost.

Coriolanus: No. You get lost.

2nd Servant: What? Me? Do you know where you are? Go to the mission if you want a free meal.

Coriolanus: I didn't ask for anything.

2nd Servant: You have no business here anyway, so begone.

Coriolanus: You are insolent.

(The Second Servant is shocked. He leaves. Sounds of whispering offstage. Then the Second Servant returns with a Third Servant.)

3rd Servant: Who are you?

Coriolanus: A gentleman.

3rd Servant: You're not dressed like a gentleman.

Coriolanus: I know that.

3rd Servant: We don't want any trouble, so just get out.

(The Third Servant grabs Coriolanus by the arm, and Coriolanus brushes him away.)

Coriolanus: Don't touch me.

3rd Servant (To the 2nd): Get the master.

2nd Servant: Yes!

(The Second Servant leaves.)

3rd Servant: Don't you have a home?

Coriolanus: My home is wherever I choose to sleep—indoors or out.

3rd Servant: Oh.—You're one of those.

Coriolanus: You're starting to bug me.

3rd Servant: Well, isn't that too bad!

(Coriolanus grabs him and throws him out. Then the Second Servant returns with Aufidius.)

Aufidius: Where is this character?

2nd Servant: Here he is, sir. We told him to leave, but he won't.

Aufidius: Who are you? Where do you come from?

(Coriolanus unmuffles.)

Coriolanus: Tullus Aufidius—don't you recognize me?

(Aufidius studies him for a moment.)

Aufidius: You bear yourself like a noble—but you're dressed like a commoner.

Coriolanus: In war I was your bitterest enemy. And when I captured Corioles, my commander-in-chief gave me the name Coriolanus. And now that name is all I have left.

Aufidius: Caius Martius!

Coriolanus: I'm here to offer myself as your ally. I've been banished from Rome, and now I want to go back with an army and punish them. So now we have a common cause. Of course, at this moment I'm at your mercy, and if you want to kill me, you can.

(Aufidius is deeply affected emotionally and takes a moment to let this sink in.)

Aufidius: Caius Martius—as much as I hated you in battle, I respected you as my equal. For you to come to me like this—to be my ally—it's the most sublime moment of my life. *(He takes Coriolanus by the shoulders.)* When two giants stand together, who can stand against them—eh?

Coriolanus: The gods have blessed me, sir.

Aufidius: Come. I've got all my most important nobles sitting in the dining hall. I can't wait to see the looks on their faces. (*They start walking out.*) I'll give you command of my army. You can do whatever you want. If anybody knows how to conquer Rome, it's you.

(Coriolanus and Aufidius leave. Then the First Servant comes in and joins the other two Servants, who are standing with open-mouthed astonishment.)

1st Servant: Who is that guy?

2nd Servant: It's Caius Martius.

1st Servant: What!

3rd Servant: He's come to join up with Aufidius and conquer Rome.

1st Servant: Conquer-Rome? (*He pauses to let this sink in. Then he jumps enthusiastically.*) Yes!

(The three Servants exchange high-fives.)

Servants: Vol-sces! Vol-sces! Vol-sces!

(They leave.)

Act 4, Scene 6. In Rome. Sicinius and Brutus come in.

Sicinius: You see? Rome can get along very nicely without Coriolanus. The people are happy, and his friends can't say anything any more.

Brutus: We made our stand, and we won.

Sicinius: Yes.—Oh—I see Menenius coming. You notice he's been totally polite to us lately.

Brutus: He knows the score. The people have the power now.

(Menenius comes in.)

Menenius: Good morning, tribunes! How are you today?

Sicinius: Just fine, sir. And the city's fine, too.

Brutus: The world hasn't come to an end—has it?

Menenius: No, and I'm certainly glad of that. Although I must say, many of the nobles—including myself—are, well—disappointed—in the way things turned out.

Sicinius: They'll get over it.

Menenius: I wish Coriolanus had handled the situation in a more moderate way. I do miss him. After all, we were very close.

Sicinius: I understand, sir. Have you heard any news about him?

Menenius: Nothing. And his mother and wife haven't heard anything either.

(Three or four Citizens pass by.)

Citizens: Hello, tribunes!—Long life to you!

Sicinius and Brutus: Thank you, friends!—The same to you!

(The Citizens go out.)

Sicinius: See how happy they are?

Menenius: Yes. I can't deny it.

(An Officer comes in.)

Officer: Tribunes, there's something you ought to know. We have a guy in prison who says the Volscians are marching on Rome. We locked him up for spreading false rumours, but I came to tell you anyway—in case they're not false.

Menenius: Aufidius! He must have heard about Coriolanus' banishment, and now he intends to attack us.

Brutus: Ridiculous! I don't believe it! *(To the Officer)* Make sure that guy gets a good whipping.

Menenius: No, no. Don't do that. We need to know the facts. You should question him calmly.

Sicinius: To hell with that. The guy is lying.

Brutus: Yes. I agree.

(A Messenger comes in.)

Messenger: Tribunes, we've gotten reports from several people that Caius Martius and Aufidius have joined up and they're on their way to Rome with the Volscian army.

Sicinius: Bullshit!

Brutus: These are obviously false rumours being spread by some of his friends who want him back.

(A Second Messenger comes in.)

2nd Messenger: Gentlemen, you're wanted at the Senate-house. There's a Volscian army coming this way, and they're being led by Martius.

Sicinius: Who says so?

2nd Messenger: The reports are flooding in from the territories, and they're detailed.

Sicinius: What the hell?

(Cominius comes in.)

Cominius: Well, I hope you tribunes are happy.

Menenius: Is it true? Coriolanus is leading the Volscian army?

Cominius: Yes, and they're destroying everything in their path. He's out for revenge, and so are the Volsces.

Menenius: He'll destroy the city—unless we beg for mercy.

Cominius: Who's going to ask—the tribunes? Us? We told him to face the people. And we didn't stop them from banishing him. And the same with all the senators and nobles. We all caved in.

Menenius: Yes. I guess we did. But these tribunes started it. They conspired to get rid of him. They're responsible.

Brutus: Hey, hey—don't blame us.

Sicinius: We were just representing the people.

(Several Citizens come in, very alarmed.)

Citizens: Is it true?—Is Martius coming?—Is he coming to attack us?

Menenius: You wanted power and you got it. And what did you do? You banished Caius Martius—purely out of personal hatred. And you humiliated him when he left.

1st Citizen: I didn't really mean it. I was just going along with everyone else.

2nd Citizen: I felt sorry for him. I didn't really want him to go. But I'm just one person.

3rd Citizen: It was just, you know, a crowd thing. We all got carried away. Nobody was really thinking.

Cominius (To Menenius): Welcome to the Republic—government by the people. This is what we overthrew the kings for.—Come on, we'd better get to the Capitol.

(Cominius and Menenius leave.)

Sicinius: Citizens, I suggest you just go home. These reports are greatly exaggerated by those who want Martius to return. Just go home and be calm. Everything will be all right.

1st Citizen (To the others): We made a mistake. Now he'll kill us.

2nd Citizen: I don't know about you, but I'm going to hide.

3rd Citizen: We'd all better hide.

(The Citizens leave, muttering to each other — “We shouldn't have”—“I didn't mean it”—Me, neither”.)

Brutus: Fucking hell. Now what'll we do?

Sicinius: I don't know.

Brutus: Maybe it's a false alarm?—Eh?

Sicinius: I kinda doubt it.—Come on, we should get to the Capitol.

(They leave, followed by the Officer and Messengers.)

Act 4, Scene 7. In the camp of Aufidius. *[Author's note: Historically, Aufidius stayed home while Coriolanus took the Volscian army to Rome. Shakespeare has Aufidius accompany the expedition.]* Aufidius comes in with his Lieutenant. *[In this context, "Lieutenant" means second-in-command.]*

Aufidius: So our men are still following Coriolanus?

Lieut: They'd follow him to the gates of hell, never mind the gates of Rome. They worship the guy. I almost think they've forgotten you, my lord.

Aufidius: It can't be helped. I need him to take Rome. I'm not going to interfere with his command.

Lieut: Frankly, I think it would have been better if you'd given him total command and stayed home yourself, or else assumed total command yourself, with him as an advisor. This shared command with him leading sort of puts you in his shadow.

Aufidius: Well, let's just see what happens when we get to Rome. He has his agenda, and I have mine. As long as he's serving mine, I'll let him. Otherwise—*(A significant look to the Lieutenant.)*

Lieut: I understand, sir.

(They leave.)

Act 5, Scene 1. In Rome. Menenius, Cominius, Sicinius, and Brutus come in.

Menenius (To the Tribunes): Why should I go and talk to him? He wouldn't talk to Cominius.

Cominius: That's right. He just ignored me. And after I left, he sent his demands in writing. It's all bad news for Rome.

Menenius (To the Tribunes): Why don't you go? You can crawl on your hands and knees and beg for mercy for Rome.

Sicinius: Oh, but sir, we're not his friends.

Brutus: He wouldn't listen to us.

Cominius (To Menenius): He's shut his heart to all his friends. He feels we let him down.

Menenius: I think we did.

Sicinius: My lord, if anyone can sway him, you can. After all, you're the wise, old man of Rome. You're his closest friend. You're his mentor.

Menenius: Ohh—

Brutus: At least try, sir.

Menenius: What if he refuses to see me?

Sicinius: Then Rome will know that at least you tried.

(*Menenius considers.*)

Menenius: All right. I'll do my best.

Sicinius and Brutus: Thank you, sir!—Good luck, sir!

Cominius: May the gods be on your side, Menenius.

(*Menenius leaves.*)

Cominius: Coriolanus won't hear him.

Sicinius: Why not?

Cominius: He's come all this way, and he's got Rome in the palm of his hand. I could read it in his eyes. All he wants is revenge.—The only thing I can think of—

Sicinius and Brutus: What, sir?

Cominius: His mother and his wife. He might listen to them. We should go talk to them.

Sicinius and Brutus: Good idea.—Yes.

(*They leave.*)

Act 5, Scene 2. *The Volscian camp, a few miles from Rome. Two Watchmen are on guard when Menenius comes in.*

1st Watch: Stop! Who are you?

Menenius: I'm a noble of Rome. I'm here to speak to Coriolanus.

1st Watch: He's not speaking to anyone from Rome.

Menenius: He'll speak to me. Tell him it's Menenius.

2nd Watch: We don't care who you are. Just go back where you came from.

Menenius: The general and I are old friends—like that. (*He presses two fingers together.*) We're almost like father and son.

2nd Watch: Our orders are not to admit anyone from Rome.

1st Watch: Do you think an old fool like you is going to make him stop? You and your people banished him. Now you can pay the price.

Menenius: Old fool, am I? Do you think I'm a nobody? If he finds out you wouldn't let me pass, you're going to be in mighty big trouble.

(*Coriolanus and Aufidius come in.*)

Coriolanus: What's the matter here?

1st Watch: This old guy—

Menenius: May the gods save you, sir! Listen to me now. You're like a son to me. Have mercy on Rome. Forgive us. Please. You should be angry with these guards instead. They wouldn't let me pass.

Coriolanus: Go home, Menenius.

(A pause of stunned silence by Menenius.)

Menenius: But—my old friend—

Coriolanus: Old friendships don't matter any more. And this is a Volscian expedition and only they can pardon Rome.

Menenius: What can I say to you? I'm Rome's last hope. Tell me the right words.

Coriolanus: There's nothing you can say. *(He takes out a letter.)* I wrote you this letter, out of respect. I was going to send it, but you can take it now. *(He gives the letter to Menenius.)* We have nothing more to say to each other. Goodbye.

(Coriolanus turns to leave with Aufidius, who speaks on the way out.)

Aufidius: I admire your firmness.

(Coriolanus and Aufidius go out.)

1st Watch: I believe you were saying how we'd be in big trouble.

Menenius: You can go to hell.

2nd Watch (Pointing): That's the way back to Rome.

1st Watch: Don't try to hide the silverware.

(Menenius leaves. Watchmen remain.)

Act 5, Scene 3. *The Volscian camp. Coriolanus and Aufidius come in. Coriolanus sits in the commander's chair, while Aufidius remains standing. Throughout this scene, Aufidius is deliberately neutral and does not react to anything.*

Coriolanus: By tomorrow we'll be at the gates of Rome. And when we get back, you'll be able to tell your nobles that I did exactly what I promised to do.

Aufidius: Yes. You did. Even when your best friends pleaded with you.

Coriolanus (After a pause of reflection): Sometimes a leader must suppress his personal feelings—by sheer force of will. You understand, don't you?

Aufidius: Of course.

(Arguing is heard offstage. Volumnia and her party are arguing with the Watchmen. Then Volumnia, Virgilia, Valeria, and Young Martius come in, followed by two Watchmen. Coriolanus

stands and signals the Watchmen to leave, and they do. Coriolanus is struggling with his emotions as he indicates to Aufidius who the visitors are.)

Coriolanus: My wife, Virgilia—my mother, Volumnia—my boy, Martius—and our friend Valeria. *(To them)* Lord Tullus Aufidius.

(Aufidius nods slightly as his only gesture of courtesy. Virgil and Volumnia are making intense eye contact with Coriolanus. Throughout this scene they are working on him as hard as they can.)

Virgilia: My husband.

Volumnia: My son.

Coriolanus: What am I supposed to say to you?

(Virgilia steps forward and kisses him, and he is struggling to control his emotions.)

Coriolanus: I thank the gods for such a noble wife—and the noblest mother in the world.

(Volumnia kneels before him. This gesture shocks him.)

Coriolanus: Mother, don't kneel.

Volumnia: For the first time in my life, I am kneeling to you.

Coriolanus: Please don't, mother.

(He lifts her to her feet.)

Volumnia: My warrior. I helped make you what you are. And perhaps someday your son will follow in your footsteps.

(Young Martius takes Coriolanus by the hand.)

Young Martius: I want to be a soldier like you, father.

Coriolanus: May the gods make you noble in thought as well as in deed, so that your fellows look up to you as an example.

Volumnia: We are all here to beg of you, my son. Stop this invasion.

Coriolanus: Please, mother! Don't ask me to dismiss my soldiers. And don't expect me to make peace with those who banished me.

Volumnia: We are asking! And if we fail, it will be because of your stubbornness.

(Coriolanus sits in his chair, gripping the arms of the chair in a significant gesture.)

Aufidius: Do you want me to leave?

Coriolanus: No. I will have no private conferences with Rome. *(He takes a deep breath and composes himself. To Volumnia)* Say what you want to say, mother.

Volumnia: Can you imagine how we feel now—the four of us? We should be the happiest people in the world, to see you well. Instead, we have to look upon you with dread as the destroyer of Rome. To which gods shall we pray now, and for what? We have always prayed for our country, and we have always prayed for you. How shall we pray now? If we do nothing and let the war take its course, the outcome will be bad, no matter what. So we come to you to persuade you to make an honourable peace for both sides. If you won't listen, then you might as well march over our bodies.

Young Martius: Not my body! I'll run away and hide until I'm a big man, and then I'll fight!

(Coriolanus rises and turns his back to them to conceal his emotions.)

Coriolanus: But I have given my word.

Volumnia: Don't go away. We're not asking you to betray the Volsces. Just make an honourable peace between them and Rome. Then they'll be able to say that they showed mercy to Rome as magnanimous victors, and Rome will be grateful. And both sides will praise you for making such a peace.—But if you continue in your present course and conquer Rome, how will you be remembered? As a conqueror, yes, but one to be hated for all time. Your name will be cursed. All your great deeds will be swept aside. You will only be remembered as a noble who lost his nobility and destroyed his own country for the sake of revenge.

Coriolanus: I don't want to hear this!

Volumnia: We kneel to you.

(Volumnia kneels, and the other ladies and Young Martius kneel, too.)

Volumnia: Look at us for the last time—because we will go back to Rome and die among our friends.—Look at us, Martius. Here is your son. Look at him. Will you deny him?

(Coriolanus faces them but is silent. He is obviously conflicted.)

Volumnia (To her party): Come. We have spoken our piece.

(They rise.)

Volumnia: Tell us to go. I must hear you say it.

(Coriolanus takes her hand, and there is a long silent pause as he considers. [Caution to Director: An overly-long pause will ruin this scene. Remember who the audience is.]

Coriolanus (Weeping): Mother!

(She embraces him, after which he resumes speaking.)

Coriolanus: You have won a happy outcome for Rome.—But as for me—I am undone. Everything is changed. The planets have shifted. I am no longer the man I was. I have to accept whatever happens. *(To Aufidius)* Aufidius, I can't give you an outright conquest, but I can give you an honourable peace on good terms. If you were in my place, what would you have done?

(There is a significant pause before Aufidius replies with measured neutrality.)

Aufidius: I was very moved.

Coriolanus: I'm sure you were. Let us consult on the terms of the peace. Then after it's signed, we'll go back to your people and explain everything. *(To his mother and wife)* Mother!—Wife!

(Coriolanus speaks privately to his Mother and Wife.)

Aufidius (Aside): When we get back, everything will be settled—to my advantage.

Coriolanus (To Volumnia and Virgilia): Yes, yes, but you'll stay and drink with us. Then you can return to Rome with the articles of peace. And I hope they build statues for you, because you made this peace possible.

(They all leave.)

Act 5, Scenes 4 and 5. *[The scene break has been eliminated.] In Rome. Menenius and Sicinius come in.*

Menenius: I tried my best, but it seems impossible. There's no moving him.

Sicinius: I'm very surprised. You were his closest friend.

Menenius: His heart has become hardened—and perhaps I should say cold as well. He may end up ruling Rome and all its territories like one of the old kings. He'll kill all his enemies. And we can thank you and Brutus for it—assuming you're still alive—which I doubt.

Sicinius (Moaning): Oh, God.

(A Messenger rushes in.)

Messenger: Good news! Rome is saved!

Menenius: What! How?

Messenger: The ladies did it. His wife and his mother. There's a peace treaty.

Sicinius: Thank God!

Menenius: Where is Martius?

Messenger: He's going back with the Volscians.

Sicinius: Where are the ladies?

Messenger: They're coming now. *(He points.)*

(There is a burst of triumphal music, and then Volumnia's party arrives, escorted by Senators and Nobles.)

Senator: There's our heroine! She saved Rome! They all saved Rome!

(General cheering. Then many Citizens come in from all directions, cheering and shouting “Rome is saved!”—“Peace for Rome!”—“Praise the Gods!” Scene ends without an exit.)

Act 5, Scene 6. *[Author’s note: This scene takes place either in Corioles or Antium, depending on which text you’re following. Penguin says Corioles; Oxford says Antium. Historically, Coriolanus returned to Antium, but Shakespeare’s text is contradictory. My preference is Antium.] There is dead silence and total darkness before the curtain goes up for this scene. Then there is an ominous sound effect or lighting effect. Aufidius comes in with an Attendant. He looks grim.*

Aufidius: Tell the senators I’m back. Give them this letter.

(He gives the Attendant a letter, and the Attendant leaves. Then three Conspirators come in.)

1st Con: Welcome back, General. You don’t look too happy.

Aufidius: No. I’m not. I trusted—that Roman—and he broke his word. When he gets here, he’s going to tell the people what a great job he did.

2nd Con: If you still want us to help you get rid of him, we’re still ready.

Aufidius: We’ll see. It depends on the feelings of the people.

3rd Con: You know what they’re like. They blow with the wind—first one way, then the other way. They just need the right prompting.

1st and 2nd Cons: Right.—Heh, heh.

Aufidius: Yes. I just have to make the accusation credible. And, of course, it is credible. He came to me and offered to be my ally, and I let him do what he wanted. Then he hogged all the glory and treated me like an inferior.

1st Con: And then just when Rome was ripe for the taking—

Aufidius: That’s it. Here’s a guy who is supposed to be so tough and uncompromising that he’d sooner get banished than suck up to the plebeians and become Consul—and then when he gets to Rome, he lets his mother talk him out of an easy victory.

2nd Con: Of course, he’ll try to put a good spin on it.

Aufidius: I won’t give him a chance. He’s famous for his hot temper. I intend to make him show it.

3rd Con. (Placing his hand on his sword): We’ll be ready for action.

Aufidius: If I call him a murderer, that’s your signal to strike.

Cons: Okay.

(Triumphant drums and trumpets are heard, with cheering.)

Aufidius: That’s him making his grand entrance. I didn’t get a welcome like that.

(The Senators come in.)

Senators: Welcome home, sir!

Aufidius: Thank you. Did you read my letter?

1st Sen: Yes. I must say we're shocked.

2nd Sen: Going all that way and then letting the Romans off the hook like that.

1st Sen: It's incredible. There's no excuse for it.

Aufidius: He's coming now.

(Coriolanus marches in with drums and colours. [Three Soldiers are needed here.] They are followed closely by some Volscian Citizens.)

Coriolanus: Hello! Greetings to the senators! We had a very successful expedition. Along the way we collected enough booty to more than pay for the whole trip. And we forced the Romans to sign this treaty, which is very honourable to the Volscians—and the Romans have certainly learned a lesson.

(He presents the treaty to the Senators, but no one takes it.)

Aufidius: Don't bother reading it. It's not worth the paper it's written on.—It's the work of a traitor!

Coriolanus: Traitor? You're calling me a traitor?

Coriolanus: Yes, Martius. You are a traitor.

Coriolanus: You're calling me Martius now?

Aufidius: Caius Martius. That's who you are. Should I call you Coriolanus to honour you for butchering our people in Corioles? *(To the others)* This traitor promised to seize Rome—and he broke his word—because his wife and mother begged him on their knees to spare the city! Of course, the wives and mothers of Corioles had no such influence! He just slaughtered everyone in sight! But when he took our army to Rome, he turned into a sniffling little boy, crying on his mother's shoulder!

Coriolanus (Looking up at heaven): Mars, do you hear this?

Aufidius: Don't talk to the god of war. He doesn't listen to weaklings.

Coriolanus: Weaklings! How dare you! You liar! You piece of snot I blow out of my nose! You've still got the scars from the last time I whipped your barbarian ass on the battlefield!

(The Citizens react as if very offended.)

1st Sen: Please!—Let's not have a quarrel.

(Coriolanus bares his throat.)

Coriolanus: Go ahead! Cut me to pieces!—Volscians! I'm not afraid! *(To Aufidius)* You loser! What do your historians say about Corioles? If they write honest history, they'll write how I took the city by myself!

(The Citizens are now reacting with great offense.)

Cons: He must die! Do you agree?

Citizens: Kill him!—Kill him!—He killed my brother!—He killed my father!

2nd Sen: No! No! We mustn't have violence!

(Aufidius has been baiting Coriolanus with a contemptuous sneer. Coriolanus draws his sword.)

Coriolanus (To Aufidius): I'd kill you right now, and all your family!

Aufidius: You villain—you traitor—you murderer!

(The three Conspirators discreetly draw their swords.)

Citizens: Kill him! Kill him!

Senators: No! No!

(Coriolanus is momentarily distracted by the Citizens, and the Conspirators rush him and strike him, killing him. The Citizens cheer. Then Aufidius raises his hands for quiet.)

Aufidius: Quiet!—Peace!

(Aufidius steps on the body of Coriolanus. There is a long pause, with dead silence on stage. The suggestion here is that Aufidius' anger has been purged. He removes his foot. He now looks at Coriolanus with pity. He speaks softly for the rest of the scene.)

Aufidius: My lords, when all the facts are explained to you, you will understand that this man was a great threat to us all. If you wish me to appear in the Senate, I will answer all your questions, and you can decide what you want to do to me.

2nd Sen: We wouldn't judge you too harshly for your anger, sir.

Other Sens: No.

Aufidius: I once hated this man more than anyone else in the world. Now that he's dead, I bury my anger with him. And our historians can write that we buried him in a manner worthy of a Roman noble. His own city cast him out—and we, his enemies, now give him a proper place of rest.—Soldiers, let's pick him up.

(The three Soldiers of the drums and colours and Aufidius pick up Coriolanus' body and carry it out, as a dead march is heard.)

END

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